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HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

Monday, May 20, 1940

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "AMERICAN DOG TICKS AND SPOTTED FEVER." Information from the Bureau of Entomology and Plant Quarantine, United States Department of Agriculture.

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Now that May is here, it's high time to talk about a common insect that carries a very dangerous disease. This is the common American dog tick or wood tick that carries spotted fever. Spring and early summer are the seasons when these ticks are most abundant and active. Generally, May and June are the big months; ticks begin to disappear in the dry hot weather of midsummer.

A great many people today have the idea that spotted fever is a new disease that is spreading rapidly. Actually, it's probably an old disease but it has only been recognized recently. The Indians may have suffered from it before the white men arrived.

But until modern times nobody understood the disease. It took modern scientists to discover this was a unique fever caused only by the bite of a tick. After that discovery people began to hear about it. And as doctors came to recognize it, of course they reported more and more cases. That's how people got the idea the disease was spreading.

The scientists first discovered ticks caused spotted fever back in 1910. That was the year Dr. Fred Bishopp and other entomologists from the Department of Agriculture went to a western State to help physicians with a serious outbreak of spotted fever. The entomologists worked for some years where Rocky Mountain wood ticks were thickest. These are the ticks causing fever in that region.

But it was not until 1930--only 10 years ago--they discovered the much more widespread American dog tick, also called wood tick, carried the same disease. In 1930 Dr. Dyer first recognized a case of spotted fever in the East and traced it to the bite of one of these ticks.

Now if one of these ticks could carry the disease, any of them might carry it. So the scientists realized immediately that spotted fever might occur wherever ticks occur--and that is here and there all the way from the Rocky Mountains east to the Atlantic Coast as well as in parts of California and Oregon. The ticks are most abundant in damp coastal regions, or in such inland States as Wisconsin, Minnesota, and parts of Iowa.

Of course, only the ticks that carry the spotted fever germ can cause the fever. And luckily only a small percentage of them carry it. The trouble is you never know. Ticks carrying the germ don't look any different from any other tick.

So far 43 out of the 48 States have reported cases of spotted fever. That indicates how widespread infected ticks are. Each year about 750 cases of spotted fever are reported in the United States. But probably some aren't recognized so aren't reported. About 1 out of every 5 cases is fatal. Doctors in the Public Health Service are working to discover how to prevent and cure the disease. They already have a vaccine. And Department of Agriculture entomologists are working to discover how to protect people against the ticks.

Here are some of the facts reported by the entomologists. Dog ticks thrive in damp places with plenty of underbrush and tall grass or weeds; but they don't live in places that are very dry. Anyone living in tick country will be wise to clear out underbrush near a camp or house. Also avoid brush and thickets along rivers, swamps, and coasts at this time of year when ticks are so active.

Only adult ticks bite human beings and dogs. Young ticks take their meals on small animals, and adult ticks on large animals. Adult ticks prefer dogs, but

they'll also lunch on cattle, hogs, wild animals like foxes, and human beings. Spotted fever is a serious disease for us, but dogs and mice and most other animals only get light cases.

The young ticks feed on little meadow mice or other small rodents. They sit on grass or low plants waiting for a mouse to come by. As the mouse brushes by the ticks get on him, and then they settle down for a long drink of blood. They can wait months for dinner. And adult ticks may wait years. Dr. Bishopp has kept some ticks 3 years sealed in a bottle without food or water. After all that time they have come out still alive and ready for dinner.

Department entomologists now have a new laboratory on an island off the coast of Massachusetts where they're studying various way to cut down the tick population. They are giving all dogs on the island a bath in derris solution 3 times a week. The island has no other wild animals for these insects to feed on so the tick population should begin to decline. They've also been cleaning out the meadow mice the young ticks feed on. Young ticks can't become adult ticks without a meal on some small rodent.

Now here are 4 simple rules suggested by Dr. Bishopp for avoiding tick trouble. First, keep ticks off your dog by dipping the dog in derris solution or brushing derris powder thickly into the fur 2 or 3 times a week during tick season. (Derris is spelled D-E-R-R-I-S). Second, keep away from underbrush as much as possible, but if you must go where ticks are, wear high boots or leggings so the ticks won't crawl up your legs. Third, examine all members of the family, especially the children, several times a day to be sure no ticks have attached themselves. Favorite spot for ticks is in the hair at the back of the neck. Fourth, keep down underbrush near the house and in the pasture.

These rules and other helpful information about the tick you will find in a Department of Agriculture leaflet. Write to the Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C., for the leaflet on controlling the American dog tick. The leaflet is free.

